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# THE JEWISH PRAYER-BOOK

AN OUTLINE OF ITS HISTORY AND  
SOME SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS

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BY

HERBERT M. ADLER, M.A., LL.M.

THE UNION OF HEBREW & RELIGION CLASSES

4 UPPER GLOUCESTER PLACE, N.W. 1

1922





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לזכרון אבי מורי



## FOREWORD

THE pages which follow contain a reprint of two articles which appeared in the first volume of the *Jewish Review* and the substance of a paper which I read before the Annual Conference of the Union of Hebrew and Religion Classes in March, 1921. It is by that body that the issue of the present booklet has been suggested, in the hope that it may be of some aid to teachers of Religion. I have now divided the matter into sections and have added brief headings.

Teachers will realize that this is but a slight, and perhaps meagre, survey of a vast subject. To those who are willing to give it some further study I would recommend reference to the following works, which should be easily accessible :—

*Annotated Edition of the Authorised Daily Prayer-book.* Singer, with notes by I. Abrahams.

*The Prayer-book.* Three Lectures by the Rev. Morris Joseph. Issued by the Jewish Study Society. Wertheimer, Lea & Co.

*The Jewish Encyclopædia* : articles, "Prayer," "Liturgy," "Shemoneh 'Esreh," "Temple, administration and service of."

"Poetry and Religion." Arthur Davis Memorial Lecture by I. Abrahams. Geo. Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

For those who are fortunate enough to understand German, I would recommend the admirable and complete treatise by Dr. I. Elbogen, "*Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*," Leipzig, 1913. Teachers who can make use of Hebrew commentaries will find invaluable assistance in Baer's *Abodath Israel* and in Landshuth's *Hegyon Leb*.

H. M. A.

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## THE HISTORY OF THE PRAYER-BOOK<sup>1</sup>

### § 1. *The Growth of the Prayer-book.*

THE Jewish Prayer-book is not merely a collection of prayers for Jews. It is a history as well; for on almost every page the strangely changing and ever-varying fortunes of our people have left their mark. Its origins are lost in antiquity, whilst its records begin fully two thousand years ago. And then, and since then, the ideals and aspirations of every period have been mirrored in the national liturgy. Temple-service with Priest and Levite, Messiah's expected advent, the hourly hope for the "Kingdom of Heaven," the Roman conquest, martyrdoms, crusades, the inquisition, civic emancipation, every one of these phases is faithfully reflected in the Prayer-book.

There is a feature that emerges with striking prominence as we cast a retrospect over the growth and structure of the Prayer-book: the willingness to add coupled with the repugnance to alter. We find, therefore, comparatively little change, but constant and successive accretion. The inquirer into the history of this subject is, therefore, much in the place of a geologist who finds layer below layer before him, going down to an almost fathomless depth, and who, from the nature and position of these strata, must reconstruct the past. Take the case of the long Grace after meals. It was once confined to the first paragraph: a simple recital of thanks for the food that sustains man and beast alike. This, in later times, is amplified by a thanksgiving for Israel's land, and with it the other national possessions, the Law and our religion. The succeeding blessing, by its very subject-matter, shows that a momentous event has transpired in the interval. The prayer is for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The operation of

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from vol. i. of the *Jewish Review*.

<sup>2</sup> See Prof. Büchler in *J.Q.R.* XX, 798.



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the same process may be followed in the Amidah. The very language of the various sections betrays differences of age. And so it is throughout the Prayer-book; and we may seriously doubt whether the vocabulary of the Kalirian piyut, in part consciously coined, and in part a heritage of the deposit of centuries of study and Midrashic lore, would be entirely intelligible to Nehemiah or Simon the Righteous, if either of these worthies were miraculously transplanted into a modern synagogue on the Day of Atonement. Greek and Latin words appear in Hebrew clothing, and Aramaic passages abound. Indeed, Hebrew and Aramaic jostle one another in the same prayer, and sometimes even in the same sentence, as, for example, in the last sentence but one of the Kaddish.<sup>1</sup> "May there be abundant peace from heaven" is Aramaic; "and life for us and all Israel" is Hebrew.

Nor, when we speak of the modern Prayer-book, must we think of it as an entirely uniform and universally accepted compilation. To exclude the Karaites, whose ritual is totally different from our own, there are differences of *minhag*, particularly in the liturgy for the Holy Days, which are far from negligible. A cursory glance at the Prayer-book of the Spanish Jews will bear this out. There are differences, too, between the German and the Polish rituals, and subdivisions even of these. Italy, Greece, Persia, China, all show variations, even as differences will be noted everywhere in the pronunciation of the common language.

Speaking generally, nevertheless, the bulk of the weekday morning service is the same in every *minhag*. And, as this is the nucleus of the Prayer-book, it may be convenient briefly to summarize the stages of its evolution, before proceeding to consider more detached features of interest.

### § 2. *Prayer in the Temple.*

Even in Temple-times prayer must have occupied some part of the service. It is inconceivable that even in the remotest times of history the people should have rested satisfied with the performances of sacrifices and oblations. Indeed, we have recorded proof to the contrary. Quite apart from individual prayers in the Temple, such as that of Hannah, we still possess in the Bible the words of the recital to accompany the offering of first-fruits,<sup>2</sup> and the words of the priests'

<sup>1</sup> *Authorised Daily Prayer-book*, ed. Singer, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxvi. 3-10.



blessing ;<sup>1</sup> whilst the Mishnah gives us the words of confession used by the High-Priest on the Day of Atonement, together with the response of the assembly. Many of the Psalms are plainly liturgical. Nor can public prayer have been restricted to the Temple. In Psalm lxx. 8, we hear of "All the meeting-places of God in the land" that have been burnt by fire. Sacrifice was prohibited outside Jerusalem, and these meeting-places were, therefore, without doubt, synagogues, such as those referred to in later times by the writers of the Gospels. The principal prayer of the Jewish liturgy, the Amidah, was by some Rabbis regarded as a substitute for the sacrifices that were abolished with the destruction of the Temple. But that it is far older is, I think, proved beyond dispute by the passage in Daniel (vi. 10), where we read that "Daniel went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime." There are cogent reasons for believing the Book of Daniel to have been written at the time of the Maccabæan rising, and we arrive at the conclusion, not only that a prayer said thrice every day was then in vogue, but that it was believed to have been so for many generations before. This harmonizes with the statement in the Talmud<sup>2</sup> that the men of the great Synagogue (i.e. from the time of Ezra) instituted Israel's prayers.

And if the obvious question be asked, why it is that we have no records of these early prayers, there is a sufficient answer. It was considered wrong to write down prayers. Jewish prayer-books are a comparatively late introduction. "They who write down blessings are as if they burnt the Law," is a saying quoted in the Talmud.<sup>3</sup>

### § 3. *The Shema'.*

The recital of the Shema' and the Amidah prayer are the two main foundations of the service. Probably the liturgical use of the Shema' goes back to the earlier date. It is said twice a day, whilst the Amidah is said thrice. Tradition also assigns an earlier date to its institution. Probably the first paragraph from Deuteronomy vi. 4-9 was first in use alone. It was well chosen. It would have been hard to find in the Law a better summing-up of the teaching of Judaism

<sup>1</sup> Num. vi. 24-26.

<sup>2</sup> Talmud Babli, *Berachoth*, 33a; and cf. Yerushalmi, *Berachoth*, 4a.

<sup>3</sup> T.B., *Sabbath*, 115b.

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than in the first two sentences, expressing the unity and love of God, or of the character of Judaism than in the injunction to keep the faith alive in the home, and to carry it abroad—not as a thing of special occasions, but as an accompaniment of everyday life. The second paragraph from Deuteronomy xi. 13–21 was doubtless chosen to supplement and echo the first. Three of its verses near the end (*vv.* 18–20) are almost identical with verses in the preceding passage. The third passage, from Numbers xv. 37–41, was perhaps chosen to emphasize the importance of national deliverance. The Tsitsith are to be a token of this as well as of the commandments of the Law.

The ceremony of reciting the Shema' in the synagogue was denoted by the obscure phrase, *פרס על שמע*, "dividing upon the Shema'." There have been endless discussions as to the significance of this term, but Dr. Elbogen<sup>1</sup> has shown by a weighty body of evidence that it had reference to the mode of recital. The section was split up or divided between reader and congregation. A member was chosen on each occasion to lead the recital, which he did from memory, and he had to pause after stated words, so that the congregation might join in.

### § 4. *The Amidah.*

The Amidah, as we have already noticed, is a structure of many generations. The first three blessings and the last three appear to have been formulated at an earlier age than those that intervene. They are uniform for all occasions, for Sabbaths and Holy Days as well as for week-days. The intervening matter was, probably, long left to the spontaneous formulation of the individual. No doubt various prayers and blessings were gradually compiled, from which he would choose, and by a process of crystallization these prayers became gradually solidified into statutory blessings. This process is so common and so potent a factor in the formation of our Prayer-book, that it deserves some attention. Distinct traces are still left of this building-up. The eighteen blessings are now nineteen. We know of a time when they were not even eighteen. The blessing beginning "And for slanderers"<sup>2</sup> was one of the additions. So, probably, was the next one, "Towards the righteous." The succeeding blessing for the rebuilding of Jerusalem cannot have been composed until

<sup>1</sup> *Studien der Geschichte des jüdischen Gottesdienstes*, pp. 11 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, *Authorised Daily Prayer-book*, p. 48.

after the destruction. The following paragraph, "Speedily cause the offspring of David,"<sup>1</sup> was at one time combined with it, and the whole formed one blessing. It would appear, therefore, that, as was natural, the later additions were inserted each as an appendix after the earlier portions. The last of the intermediate blessings, "Hear our voice,"<sup>2</sup> was naturally reserved, by the nature of its subject-matter, as a conclusion.

The intermediate blessings used on week-days were replaced by a suitable blessing on Sabbath and Holy Days. The Amidah for these occasions was much shorter. For one occasion, however, it was abnormally long. We read details of it in an interesting passage of the Mishnah,<sup>3</sup> where the service is described which is held on a special fast-day, or day of humiliation, such as was proclaimed when rain had not fallen for many days. The service is held in the open air, and an Ark of the Law is set up there. A venerable man delivers "depressing words"—by which, no doubt, a sermon is intended. The address began with "My brethren." Texts considered suitable were, "And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way,"<sup>4</sup> and "Rend your hearts and not your garments."<sup>5</sup> The people then stand up for the Amidah, which is rehearsed to them by one of their number, who descends before the Ark to do so.<sup>6</sup> His qualifications are not only that he should be accustomed to the recital, but that he should be old, and have sons, "and that his house should be empty, so that his heart may be perfect in prayer." In addition to the eighteen blessings of each day six others are added. The blessing is in each case preceded by a passage from Scripture, and by a few words of prayer.

Thus the first blessing is introduced by passages from Scripture concerning Divine Remembrance, verses such as those which were collected for the New Year Additional Service, and which we still retain.<sup>7</sup>

*Prayer*: "He who answered our ancestors by the Red Sea, may He answer you and hear the voice of your cry this day."

*Blessing*: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who rememberest the things forgotten."

The second blessing is similarly introduced by scriptural

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Taanith*, 2, i.

<sup>4</sup> Jonah iii. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Joel ii. 13.

<sup>6</sup> For the meaning of this phrase see Elbogen, pp. 33 sqq.

<sup>7</sup> Singer, p. 250.



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verses concerning the shophar,<sup>1</sup> which was sounded at intervals by the priests.

*Prayer* : "He who answered Joshua in Gilgal, may He answer you and hear the voice of your cry this day."

*Blessing* : "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who hearkenest to the shophar-blast."

The scriptural portions of the other blessings consisted of Psalms, all of them appropriate to the occasion, viz. Psalm cxx., "In my distress I cried unto the Lord"; cxxx., "Out of the depths have I cried"; cxxi., "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills"; cii., "A prayer of the afflicted."

### § 5. *The Service of the Temple Ma'amad.*

Having thus touched upon the Shema' and the Amidah, the two pillars of the fabric of the liturgy, it will be of interest to turn to a passage in the Mishnah,<sup>2</sup> where an account is given of the service in the Temple held by the "ward" or "rota" on duty. Apart from the introductory ברכו, it consisted of four parts :

(a) A blessing (without doubt the prayer "With abounding love");<sup>3</sup>

(b) The Ten Commandments ;

(c) The three paragraphs of the Shema' ;

(d) Three blessings, viz. "True and firm," "Concerning the Service," and the priestly blessing.<sup>4</sup>

The second and third parts, as passages of the Bible, call for no comment ; but a few words of explanation may be given with regard to the two other sections.

(a) The first blessing, also called "The blessing over the Law," has been identified with the prayer, אהבה רבה. This has a counterpart, the prayer, "With everlasting love,"<sup>5</sup> in the evening service. The theme of the blessing in each case is the Divine Love, and its manifestation to Israel through the giving of the Law. A further blessing was subsequently added and placed before it, its subject being thanksgiving for light. Similarly, in the evening service, a blessing was introduced, concerning the darkening of the twilight. But, whilst this latter blessing retained its original shape, the morning blessing was successively amplified until it reached its present abnormal size. It begins with the words, "Blessed art Thou . . . who

<sup>1</sup> Cf. New Year Service, Singer, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Tamid*, 5, i.

<sup>3</sup> Singer, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Singer, p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Singer, p. 96.

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formest light and createst darkness,"<sup>1</sup> and continues till "Blessed art Thou . . . Creator of the luminaries."<sup>2</sup> A critical analysis reveals the process of accretion. Piyutanic embellishments, for instance, may be detected in the alphabetical passage, אל ברוך גדול דעה.<sup>3</sup> Remnants of a similar acrostic exist in כלם אהובים כלם בוררים, etc. Scholars, such as Rapoport and Zunz, had attempted the reconstruction of the original blessing, and their conjectures have been substantiated in a remarkable manner by the discovery of certain fragments in the Genizah at Cairo. These show conclusively that the original prayer was identical with a so-called contraction recommended by Saadyah.<sup>4</sup> It reads thus: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who formest light and createst darkness, who makest peace and createst all things,<sup>5</sup> who in mercy givest light to the earth and to them that dwell thereon, whose goodness reneweth the creation every day continually, as it is said, 'To Him that made great lights; for His mercy endureth for ever.' Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Creator of the luminaries."

(d) The prayer, אמת ויציב, "True and firm," we still possess. The first paragraph is a kind of homiletical commentary on the first section of the Shema'. The last paragraph is, similarly, a commentary on the last portion of the Shema'. The blessing "Concerning the Service" is probably the sixteenth blessing of the Amidah in its pre-destruction form, "Whom alone we serve in awe";<sup>6</sup> the priestly blessing is probably the eighteenth blessing of the Amidah,<sup>7</sup> incorporating the Aaronic benediction.<sup>8</sup> It is conceivable that in these two blessings we have the nucleus of the whole Amidah.

### § 6. *Psalms as a Part of the Morning Service.*

We have formed some idea of the growth of the principal sections of the daily morning service. In our Prayer-book, however, it is preceded by a considerable body of matter, which falls into two heads: (i) Private Prayers; (ii) Psalms, and the Song of Moses.

Dealing with the latter portion first, we find that its introduction is due to the Rabbinic recommendation to begin with words of praise. The number of psalms is augmented on

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Singer, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Elbogen, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> A conscious euphemism for "evil." See Isa. xlv. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Still used when the priests' blessing is said.

<sup>7</sup> Singer, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Num. vi. 24-27.

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Sabbath and Holy Days. This section is introduced and concluded with a blessing, in the one case the prayer, "Blessed be He who spake,"<sup>1</sup> and in the other "Praised be Thy Name."<sup>2</sup> These compositions appear to be of great antiquity. So is the beautiful passage said on Sabbaths and Holy Days, "The breath of every living being."<sup>3</sup>

### § 7. *Individual Devotions.*

The first section of the Prayer-book does not, properly speaking, belong to the Synagogue service at all. It consists of prayers which were originally said in the home, and which have since been transplanted into the Synagogue. Some of them still retain the singular number in which they were written. Nor does the Chazan at the present day invest himself with the Tallith till their conclusion. Some of the prayers were obviously composed and originally intended for use immediately on awaking. Such are the blessings directly referring to waking, washing the hands, dressing, and so forth. The German Jews appear, following the example of Meir of Rothenburg, who lived in the thirteenth century, first to have instituted the inclusion of this section among the prayers of the Synagogue.<sup>4</sup> The French Jews were slower in following the innovation.

The succession of blessings on pages 5-6 of the Authorised Prayer-book seems to have grown up gradually. Thus the blessing, "Who giveth strength to the weary," is not found in the Prayer-book of R. Amram of the ninth century. Some at least of these blessings were probably not intended for everyday use.

In the other prayers we find a considerable divergency of usage; the explanation lies in their nature as optional, as opposed to statutory prayers. Some of them were composed by Rabbis for themselves, and subsequently popularized through the action of their schools. The fine prayer, *אלהי נשמה*, "O my God, the soul . . ."<sup>5</sup> is mentioned in the Talmud as a prayer that may be said on waking. In the same passage we meet with the first *ויהי רצון*, "May it be Thy will . . . And lead us not into temptation . . . Keep us far from a bad companion . . ."<sup>6</sup> of which the blessing immediately preceding it forms part. As quoted in the Talmud, the

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Singer, p. 125. See Talmud Babli, *Pesachim*, 118a.

<sup>4</sup> Berliner, *Randbemerkungen zum täglichen Gebetbuche*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Singer, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Singer, p. 7, ad init.



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singular number is used throughout. It is to be regretted that the simplicity of so essentially individual a prayer should have been marred by a partial change into the plural. The following prayer, "May it be Thy will . . . to deliver me this day . . ." was used by the famous "Judah the Prince," one of the compilers of the Mishnah. Amongst other such private prayers quoted in the Talmud is the יהי רצון, the prayer for life, which is now said on the Sabbath before the New Moon. The first verse,<sup>1</sup> however, containing a reference to the coming month, is a later addition. The author, "Rav," who lived in the third century, composed it for everyday use.

Here are two prayers which might well have been included in the Prayer-book : <sup>2</sup>

R. Zevia used to end his prayer thus : "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God, that we may not sin, or be confounded or be ashamed of our fathers."

R. Hija used to pray : "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God, that Thy Law may be our faith, and that our heart grow not faint nor our eyes dim."

Amongst similar prayers is one composed by "Rava" (fourth century). It is the prayer commencing, "O my God, before I was formed."<sup>3</sup> It was written for the Day of Atonement, and we still use it for that occasion, though at one time it was introduced as a daily prayer.

The prayer, "O my God, guard my tongue from evil,"<sup>4</sup> was used by Mar, son of Rabina (fifth century), to conclude the Amidah. It contained a phrase which has now slipped out : "Deliver me from an evil occurrence, from the evil inclination, from an evil woman, and from all evils that distract the world." The selection of the other sex seems ungenerous, but perhaps the unsophisticated Rabbi felt less in need of protection from his fellow-man.

It can hardly, I think, be sufficiently regretted that this old usage, by which the individual was encouraged even in the Synagogue to frame some portion of his prayer for himself, has fallen into desuetude. There is now no blank page left in the Prayer-book. Nor can the worshipper exercise even the right of selection which he once possessed, and choose his prayer where he cannot make it. The chief culprit, at whose door the blame for this stereotyping process must be laid, is the printing-press. It may, perhaps, one day be mitigated by restoring into the Prayer-book some of the best

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> Singer, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> *Berachoth*, 16b.

<sup>4</sup> Singer, p. 54.

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of the many individual prayers recorded in the Talmud, in the ancient Siddurim, and elsewhere—not as part of the regular service, but as a collection of purely optional prayers suggested for individual devotion.

To illustrate this point further, let me refer to the תחנון, the “supplication,”<sup>1</sup> said in the Synagogue on week-days with bowed head. It was originally a silent prayer said after the Amidah, “a voluntary outpouring, in which each man prostrated himself before God and silently composed his own prayer.”<sup>2</sup>

The Siddur of R. Amram contains a number of suitable prayers, leaving it to the worshipper to select from them. “Sovereign of all Worlds, may it be Thy will that Thy Law may be my faith and my work every day, and suffer me not to go astray in it. Put me not in need of the gifts of flesh and blood, for the gift is small, and the reproach is great.” And again: “Sovereign of all Worlds and Lord of lords, help me and support me in my livelihood and the livelihood of my family. Put me not to shame, either before Thee or before flesh and blood.”

At the present day these beautiful prayers have entirely disappeared. Their place is taken by a solitary psalm (Psalm vi.), which, strangely enough, is prefixed by a line which has no connection with it, “And David said unto Gad,” etc. (2 Sam. xxiv. 14), whilst the true heading of the psalm is altogether omitted. The explanation is, no doubt, that the verse from Samuel at one time formed a short introduction to one of the prayers composed to serve as the silent “supplication.” It is noteworthy that the Spanish ritual has Psalm xxv. instead of Psalm vi.: “Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.”

### § 8. *The Piyut.*

To return to our subject. We have cast a glance over the evolution of the morning service, and have seen how its tripartite division came into existence. We have, however, so far, only examined the skeleton of the body, the framework of the edifice. This was successively filled in and embellished by later prayers and hymns. The *piyut* (derived from ποιήτης, poet) was an artificial excrescence upon the rigid form of the statutory service. The *piyutan*, as the author is called, appears very early, and must have been at work as far back,

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Berliner, p. 24.

at least, as the seventh century. His compositions constantly increased. Sabbaths, Festivals, and Penitential Days all afforded him good opportunities. Many Rabbis discountenanced these additions, viewing with dismay the inroads they were making. But they proved popular. They gave variety to the service, and an opportunity to the Chazan. Indeed, the Chazan sometimes intoned his own compositions. We find, therefore, as might be expected, an immense diversity in the piyutim that obtain in different communities, and even in the same communities at different times. Chief amongst piyut-writers is Eleazar Kalir. His country is uncertain; so is his date, which is variously assigned between the eighth and tenth centuries. He may be called the father of the piyut, and a vast number of his compositions are embodied in the festival liturgy. His style is frequently obscure. He delights in recondite allusions to the Midrash, so that one would imagine that his productions were intended for a select gathering of scholars. The form, also, is elaborate. Besides extended rhymes—they run sometimes to a whole page—he delights in alliteration and acrostics. Where words are recalcitrant, and refuse to rhyme or fit, he sometimes coins them: he makes nouns out of verbs, verbs out of nouns, and adjectives out of both. Nevertheless, he displays a vigour of treatment and a richness of language. Occasionally he grows simpler, and the thought, having some freedom from the self-imposed trammels of form, shows a loftiness of conception too often obscured. Other prominent composers were Meshullam ben Kalonymos, who lived in Italy in the second half of the tenth century, and Simeon ben Isaac ben Abun, of Mayence, of the same date. These all belonged to the eastern school, of Germany, France, and Italy. In Spain, however, the piyut took a different root, which bore a riper fruit. There Solomon ibn Gabirol (the Avicbron of the schoolmen), Jehudah Halevi, and the Ibn Ezras composed hymns for the liturgy, festal, penitential, and threnic, which rank amongst the masterpieces of Hebrew literature. As examples of Ibn Gabirol's work may be cited "The Crown of Sovereignty,"<sup>1</sup> said in some congregations on the evening of the Day of Atonement, and the morning hymn, שֶׁהָרַב אֲבִיבֶרֶךְ.<sup>2</sup> Jehudah Halevi's most celebrated poem is the "Ode to Zion," צִיּוֹן הָלֵא הִשְׁאֵלִי,<sup>3</sup> for the fast of Ab. The use of metre is characteristic of the Spanish

<sup>1</sup> See Alice Lucas, *The Jewish Year*, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> See *Service of the Synagogue*, vol. i, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> See Nina Salaman in *J.Q.R.* XII, 213.



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school. The vocabulary is simple and classical. The thought is elevated, and the style imaginative without being ornate. We can but regret that the German and Polish liturgies have not incorporated more of these poems. The Spanish Jews have been happier in this respect.

### § 9. *The Cabbalists.*

Amongst those who have left their mark on the liturgy are the Cabbalists, though at one time their hold on it was much greater than it now is. Their fault is an addiction to angelology, and a hyper-mysticism, which manifests itself in the endowment of certain names and numbers with potent powers. Nevertheless, there is a deep spirituality to be found in many of their prayers. They may often be recognized by the prefatory words, "Behold, I am prepared to fulfil the command of my Creator," etc. Two of such prayers may be mentioned: a morning meditation, "Behold, I take upon myself the commandment, Love thy neighbour as thyself"; and a night prayer, "Behold, I forgive everyone who has angered me or vexed me or sinned towards me, and may no one be punished for my sake."

### § 10. *The Siddurim, Preservation of Variants.*

Such have been the contributors to our Prayer-book. They come from all ages and all countries. Such degree of uniformity as exists is due to the compilation and authority of the Siddurim, or prayer-books, compiled by famous Rabbis, such as R. Amram, Maimonides, and Simhah ben Samuel of Vitry. Several curious features have resulted from this process of flexible development. Variants are naturally found, and they are perpetuated. So carefully have they been preserved, that we frequently find instances where both versions are retained. Sometimes one version is adopted for ordinary use, while another version is reserved for special occasions. Thus the eighteenth blessing of the Amidah had two forms from a very remote period: "Who blessest Thy people Israel with peace," and "Who makest peace."<sup>1</sup> For no very intelligible reason the former version is used for everyday purposes, whilst the latter is confined to the ten Penitential Days. Sometimes both variants are recited together, e.g. the double מוֹרִים.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, p. 51.

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## § 11. Popularization of Prayers and Hymns. Their Disuse. Errors. Expansion.

Another process that we find very general is the popularization of prayers and hymns. Though written for special days, they are afterwards employed for many other occasions. Thus the well-known prayer, *עלינו*,<sup>1</sup> was originally an introduction to the "Kingdom" verses of the New Year Additional Service, and it still retains its original place.<sup>2</sup> In course of time, but certainly after the ninth century, it was adopted for everyday use, and was employed to conclude the morning service. Later still it became attached as the concluding prayer for every service in the Synagogue.

*אָרֹן עוֹלָם* and *יגדל*<sup>3</sup> were both composed for the Day of Atonement. The latter is in Worms still sung on the evening of that Fast only. The Hymns of Unity and the Hymn of Glory were originally restricted in the same way, and in their case many advocate a return to this practice. The hymn, *המבדיל*,<sup>4</sup> now sung on Saturday night, is obviously a penitential hymn taken from the Neilah Service of the Day of Atonement.

Exactly the reverse process, that of restriction, is also to be traced. Thus *אין כַּאֲלֵהֵינוּ* used to be said every day. So the *יהי רצון* said on the Sabbath before the New Moon was, as we have seen above, originally a daily prayer.

Some prayers have been even less fortunate; they have died altogether. Such are the extinct blessing before the Shema',<sup>5</sup> and the mourner's grace.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes a phrase which was originally due to a mistake has become perpetuated. Thus, "And say ye Amen" at the end of the silent prayer *נִצּוֹר אֱלֹהֵי*<sup>7</sup> is borrowed by false analogy from the Kaddish, which concludes with the same verse. Again, the unnecessary and ungrammatical relative with which *אֲשֶׁר בְּגִלְל אֲבוֹת*, the composition in praise of the Law chanted on the last day of Tabernacles, begins, is explained in a moment when we learn that it is a vestige of a blessing now fallen out of use: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who . . ."

Most common of all is the feature of expansion, to which I referred at the beginning of this article. The long list of *מַלְכֵנוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ*'s seems to have grown from only two.<sup>8</sup> So also

<sup>1</sup> Singer, pp. 76-7.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 2, 3.

<sup>4</sup> See such phrases as "He will forgive our sins," "The day declines," "Open for me the gate."

<sup>5</sup> See Prof. Schechter, "Genizah Specimens," in *J.Q.R.* X, 654.

<sup>6</sup> Siddur of R. Amram.

<sup>7</sup> Singer, p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> See *Taanith*, 25b.



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with regard to the **על חמשה** *el ha-mishe*'s. The Siddur of R. Amram has only eight, as compared with our forty-four.<sup>1</sup>

I have given but a partial glimpse of the wealth of this field of investigation. The Prayer-book presents a unique testimony to the growth and continuity of our faith, and a proof that Judaism, whilst preserving the vital characteristics of its essence, has been found capable of adaptation to the need of each generation.

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<sup>1</sup> Excluding the eight general **על חמשה** *el ha-mishe*, which are common to both.



## TEACHING THE PRAYER-BOOK

*A Paper read before the Annual Conference of the Union of Hebrew and Religion Classes, March 1921.*

IN opening the discussion this afternoon, I am conscious that I am a layman addressing an audience consisting largely of experts. Yet I feel that in the subject of Jewish religious teaching every father and mother may in a sense claim to be a professional. For upon us lies the duty ושננתם לבניך, and we are therefore all teachers.

I will start by begging a question. I will assume this hypothesis, that we all desire to employ the Tephillah, not solely as a reading-primer or a translation-manual, or even to expound it as a piece of literature, nor yet to make it a mere handbook containing a collection of prayers of which a limited number have got to be taught, but that we prefer to approach it as a presentment of the whole of Judaism, its ideals and its beliefs. In this sense it would become for us a very shrine in which our highest aspirations and our most cherished truths are contained. In this spirit, too, we should use the Prayer-book not alone in order to teach boys and girls to pray, but in order to make and keep them Jews.

The paramount object before us must therefore be to nurture a love for the Prayer-book. It may share the holiness of the Sepher Torah, but it must not be put away out of sight in an Ark for a week at a time. We want it to make a more intimate call upon the child. We wish him to use it day by day, to finger each page affectionately, to turn quickly to the lines which already have their place in his ever-active brain. He must make a friend of it. And so, to my mind, the first essential is that he should have a Tephillah of his own. I should like to see his name in it, inscribed by his father or his teacher. He must have a property in it more absolute than a general right to share in the family books. It must be his, and he must be able to take it with him when he goes from home. I do not say that he should bring it to school.

A certain amount of rough usage is inevitable there, and we want him to care to keep the book untattered and unsoiled.

And I would go further. You want the boy not merely to have a prayer-book of his own, but to have his own prayers, prayers which he may feel are in a special sense his own, because he himself has chosen them. We teach many prayers in the school. We do not expect that they will all be said regularly. But out of them I would encourage a child to select this or that prayer that specially appeals to him and to say it at home as a morning or evening prayer. A little girl of eight will not grasp phrases like "an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob," a passage usually included in prayers for young children, nor are the words likely to be more intelligible in Hebrew. But she can quite understand

"Blessed be the Lord by day; blessed be the Lord by night.

Blessed be the Lord when we lie down; blessed be the Lord when we rise up . . ."<sup>1</sup>

and the Hebrew is not likely to be too difficult for her.

And so in the daily morning prayers which we wish boys and girls to say as they grow up, remembering that a little with devotion is better than much without devotion, it is easy to suggest to them that they should make for their own a prayer like the ancient שחריתנו, first recorded in the Talmud:<sup>2</sup>

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the World, who makest sleep to pass from mine eyes and slumber from mine eyelids. And may it be Thy will, O Lord my God, and God of my fathers, to make me to tread in the path of Thy law and to cleave to Thy commandments, and bring me not into the power of sin or wrongdoing or into the power of temptation or into contempt. Let not the evil will rule over me, and keep me far from a wicked man and a wicked companion. Cause me to cleave to the good will and to good deeds, and make my will obedient to Thee. . . ."

Another such prayer is that of Rab<sup>3</sup> petitioning for a happy, useful and honourable life.

Personally I regret the decay of the old-fashioned custom of teaching the child its "name-verse," a special verse of its own, generally chosen from the Psalms, beginning with the first letter of his name and ending with the last letter. There is nothing superstitious in the practice. It gives the child a sense of possession such as he derives from owning his own little corner of a garden. And so I remember being taught by my father that the fervent אברה רבה<sup>4</sup> was in a particular

<sup>1</sup> Singer, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Berachoth*, 60b; Singer, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Singer, p. 154; v. also ante, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Singer, p. 39.

sense a birthday-prayer, one which had a special significance on that all-important day of one's calendar.

It is by methods and devices of this kind that we can weld the golden chain which will bind our children to the Prayer-book throughout their lives.

I remarked just now that the Prayer-book could be regarded as a presentment of Judaism. I mean that our faith is mirrored in its pages, more truly indeed than it can be reflected in any artificial set of dogmas. The soul of a people lies in its prayers. Where the voice calls straight from the heart to God there can be no place for hypocrisy or sectarian assertiveness or aping assimilation. No individual has here foisted on us a doctrine of his own by the sanction of his single *imprimatur*. Only the collective recognition of Israel throughout the ages has given authority for what shall or shall not be contained within those covers. The hopes and fears of generations lie here, the striving and the tears of a million lives.

To resume, we want to teach religion out of the Prayer-book. We want to teach it incidentally, displacing to a large extent formal lessons with their titles and subheadings, and even eliminating the Thirteen Creeds of Maimonides from the set curriculum. There should be no difficulty in following out this system, except indeed that it becomes increasingly necessary to choose with care what passages you will teach in the all too limited hours at your disposal.

Let me give an illustration of the method I am advocating. I will suppose that the syllabus for the term's work provides for the translation of the Shema' and the first three blessings of the Amidah.

Could you have a more condensed and vigorous summation of the essence of Judaism than those two sentences that declare that there is only one God ; that this truth is Israel's sacred knowledge, and that we serve God by loving Him with all our being ?

I would tell the story of the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba : <sup>1</sup> of how he rejoiced in the sacrifice he was to make to testify his faith. The tyrant Rufus, one of the Emperor Hadrian's tools, had condemned Akiba to death for teaching the Law, and the hour of his execution was at hand. It was the time for the recital of the Shema'. "Now at last," exclaimed the Rabbi, "I can show that I love God with all my heart and all my soul and all my might—

בכל נפשך אפילו נוטל את נשמתך

<sup>1</sup> *Berachoth*, 61b ; J. M. Myers, *Story of the Jewish People*, i. 187.



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with all thy soul, even though He take thy life." I would tell how he dwelt on the last אָרָר until his soul left him, and of the divine whisper that was heard :

"Happy art thou, Akiba, for thou art assured of the world to come."

When I had taught the rendering of the verse בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם and had explained that it was an interpolation from the Mishnah, I would tell of the origin of this blessing in the Service of the Temple, and of how the High-Priest uttered the ineffable Name on the Day of Atonement, and how the people in the court prostrated themselves as they heard it, exclaiming in unison :

"Blessed be His glorious, sovereign Name for ever and ever."

You will point out how, to this day, we still perpetuate this rite when we kneel during the recital of the Abodah.<sup>1</sup>

I have often heard children ask gropingly for an explanation of our blessing God's Name. It is a natural question, for they have been taught that God has no name. You can show them in their Prayer-book the four-lettered name which they have learned to pronounce *Adonai*, and you can explain to them the reverence which forbids our uttering it. They call their parents "father" and "mother," and never address them by their proper names ; and so we call our Father in heaven "Lord," even though the actual Name be printed on the page before us.

I need not go through the rest of the Shema' or dwell on the manner in which Tsitsith, Tephillin, and Mezuzzah can all be taught from it. So full is it of religious teaching, that tradition has it that the Ten Commandments are all here embodied.

Let us turn to the Amidah, the prayer that we say in silence turning towards the East.

The first blessing that invokes the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob gives the child an immediate chance of carrying his mind back to the Bible stories you have been telling him and of making a connection of thought between the Bible and the Prayer-book. Children love to compare and to recognize. It is something of a thrill to a child to make the leap from one island of ideas to another. These, you will say, are the same men we heard of in the Bible, and we are here thanking God who taught them first how to serve

<sup>1</sup> *Service of the Synagogue, Day of Atonement*, ii. 161.

and worship Him, and their children after them and their children's children, until we reach those very children of Israel who are sitting in this classroom.

The theme of the second blessing is the resurrection of the dead. I do not share the opinion that this is a topic to be avoided. My own experience is that children of seven have some sort of an idea of death, generally as of something black and fearful. They have seen dead animals, and they have seen a funeral procession. The child has already asked itself: "Will this happen to me too, and how may I escape it?" Fears are only intensified by deliberate avoidance.

The *החיים המתים* gives the teacher a golden opportunity of explaining quite naturally and without any appearance of forced effort something of our belief as to the future life. "Who keepest Thy faith to them that sleep in the dust." There is a quiet simplicity in these few words which goes home far better than the cumbrous and austere recital: "I believe with a perfect faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead."

But infinitely more convincing, even than this direct reference, is the insertion in this *ברכה* of the allusion to the Sender of rain:

"Thou, O Lord, art mighty for ever; Thou quickenest the dead, Thou art mighty to save. Thou causest the wind to blow and the rain to fall."

There is a genius that is indeed inspiration in this sudden mention of rain, the symbol of revivifying life.<sup>1</sup> All the homilies in the world would not appeal to a child like this comparison. He has seen the bare boughs burst into sudden promise of new life after an April shower. He has seen the rain refresh the parched brown grass in August. Is it hard for him to believe that the Creator can again give life to those whom He calls His very children?

We reach the *קרישה*. I have never found that there is any particular difficulty in speaking to children of angels. They have all heard of fairies, and they understand—perhaps better than we grown-up people do—how a thing can have both meaning and beauty, and yet not be solidly factual. Still, if the teacher has scruples, let him pass the angels by. I do not think they will weep. He has a great opportunity here to show what we mean by holiness when we call God holy and even ourselves a holy people. He can explain what *קרישה* means, and he can tell of Rabbi Yom Tob and the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isaiah xxvi. 19.

martyrs of York, who seven hundred years ago on the Great Sabbath<sup>1</sup> offered up their lives to sanctify the Name.

I have given you but a few bare instances of what I mean. The Rev. A. A. Green last year gave this Conference an exposition of the blessing ולמלשינים which I think we all gratefully retain. It is another illustration of the use that can be made of an intensive study of the Prayer-book. Had time sufficed, I could have cited the Perek or the incomparable Adon Olam.

We may go even further. When the Festival and Solemn Days draw near, how better can we teach their purport than by studying something of the liturgy for those days? Can the call of Repentance be rendered more vivid than by a realization of the words of the Neilah prayer?—

“Thou givest a hand to transgressors, and Thy right hand is stretched out to receive the penitent.”<sup>2</sup>

Or again :

“Open the gate for us,  
Yea, even at the closing of the gate ;  
For day is nearly past.  
The day is passing thus ;  
The sun is low, the day is growing late ;  
O let us come into Thy gates at last.”<sup>3</sup>

I am afraid that I am detaining you too long, that indeed the day is growing late. I am tempted to go on, to show, for instance, how compelling an interest might be aroused by teaching an advanced class something of the structure and growth of the daily service, tracing its origins in the distant Temple worship, and following its evolution through the changes and additions of the passing centuries. There are our hymns, and the delight that can be evoked by explaining their metre, their rhyme, and often the acrostic hidden within them. But I must leave these fascinating topics. Perhaps others will develop them when they join in the discussion.

What I have tried to say amounts to this : that you can teach the Prayer-book best by arousing in your pupils their love for it and their interest. True, they will want to talk to you about it, and they will question you, question you unmercifully.

But will not this be a sign that you have succeeded ?

<sup>1</sup> Jacobs, *Jews of Angevin England*, 123 sqq., 131.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> *Service of the Synagogue, Day of Atonement*, ii. 258. Trans. by Mrs. R. N. Salaman.



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